

Results From a Montana 2023 Non-Resident Mule Deer Hunter Survey

A Survey Conducted By:



Wildlife Division

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BACKGROUND AND SURVEY METHODS

The focus of this report are results from a non-resident mule deer hunter survey conducted by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) in Montana. Following the 2022 hunting season, FWP conducted this survey to help evaluate Montana's mule deer management relative to hunting and harvest opportunities.

Mailback surveys were sent to a randomly selected statewide sample of N=800 non-resident Montana deer license holders pulled from the pool of all non-resident deer license holders for the 2022 hunting season (as identified from FWP's automated license system database). Survey mailings included an initial mailing of the surveys sent out in late October 2022, followed up by replacement mailings sent out to non-respondents about four to five weeks after the initial mailing of the surveys. Surveys were successfully mailed out to a total of N=795 non-resident deer license holders (there were a total of five surveys that were undeliverable). A total of N=350 non-resident deer license holders responded to the survey, resulting in an overall 44 percent response rate for the non-resident survey. This response rate is considered to be good for a mailback survey of this kind.

This report provides only overall statewide results from this important survey. Due to the sample size for the non-resident survey, region specific survey information is not available from this study. However, survey results include information regarding which region of Montana nonresidents spent the most time hunting mule deer during the past five years (see the map below for the seven FWP administrative regions of Montana).



SURVEY RESULTS

Overall, 85 percent of all the survey respondents reported they hunted mule deer in Montana during the past five years. These respondents are the focus of this report.

Importance of Mule Deer Hunting in Montana

Response to... “How important is mule deer hunting to you in Montana? (Check only ONE below)”

- 1.0% It is **my LEAST important** hunting activity
- 2.0% It is **one of my least important** hunting activities
- 20.9% It is **no more or no less important** than my other hunting activities
- 59.6% It is **one of my most important** hunting activities
- 16.5% It is **my MOST important** hunting activity

Mule Deer Hunting by Region of Montana

Response to... “In what **REGION** of the state have you spent the MOST TIME hunting mule deer in Montana during the past FIVE years? (Check only ONE below)”

- 2.7% Region 1
- 18.2% Region 3
- 3.7% Region 5
- 34.1% Region 7
- 3.4% Region 2
- 17.9% Region 4
- 19.9% Region 6

Reasons for Why Hunters Spend Most of Their Time Hunting Mule Deer in this Region of Montana (Aggregate Results for All Seven Regions of Montana Combined)

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (very unimportant) to 5 (very important), how important were the following potential reasons for why you spent most of your time hunting mule deer in this REGION of the state during the past five years? (Circle only ONE number for each item below)”

	1 Very Unimportant	2	3	4	5 Very Important
To hunt close to home	61.9%	10.1%	11.2%	9.0%	7.9%
To hunt in a familiar location	14.5%	8.9%	21.6%	30.5%	24.5%
Mule deer numbers	7.9%	3.2%	27.0%	33.5%	28.4%
<u>Antlerless</u> mule deer numbers	37.8%	14.4%	24.5%	14.7%	8.6%
Mule deer <u>buck</u> numbers	7.9%	3.2%	19.6%	35.7%	33.6%
Access to hunt mule deer on PUBLICLY owned land	12.8%	4.6%	13.5%	24.8%	44.3%
Access to hunt <u>antlerless</u> mule deer on PRIVATELY owned land	52.0%	12.9%	14.0%	9.0%	12.2%
Access to hunt mule deer <u>bucks</u> on PRIVATELY owned land	29.1%	7.1%	14.5%	16.0%	33.3%
To be able to hunt <u>mule deer</u> and <u>other game species</u> at the same time	9.5%	7.4%	14.0%	26.3%	42.8%

Perceptions Regarding Opportunities to Hunt Mule Deer in the Region of Montana Where Respondents Spent the Most Time Hunting Mule Deer During the Past Five Years (Aggregate Results for All Seven Regions of Montana Combined)

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent), how would you rate the following in this **REGION** of Montana? (Circle only ONE number for each item below)”

	1 Poor	2	3	4	5 Excellent
Overall opportunities to hunt mule deer	1.7%	6.6%	26.8%	38.0%	26.8%
Opportunities to hunt <u>antlerless</u> mule deer	12.8%	10.0%	29.9%	23.5%	23.8%
Opportunities to hunt mule deer <u>bucks</u>	3.8%	8.0%	24.5%	36.4%	27.3%
Opportunities to hunt <u>mature</u> mule deer bucks	10.8%	16.0%	27.8%	27.8%	17.6%

Perceptions Regarding Access to Hunt Mule Deer in the Region of Montana Where Respondents Spent the Most Time Hunting Mule Deer During the Past Five Years (Aggregate Results for All Seven Regions of Montana Combined)

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent), how would you rate the following in this **REGION** of Montana? (Circle only ONE number for each item below)”

	1 Poor	2	3	4	5 Excellent
Access to PUBLICLY owned land to hunt mule deer	6.0%	11.3%	24.5%	33.7%	24.5%
Access to PRIVATELY owned land to hunt <u>antlerless</u> mule deer	24.9%	18.5%	22.1%	19.2%	15.3%
Access to PRIVATELY owned land to hunt mule deer <u>bucks</u>	22.5%	13.7%	23.9%	19.6%	20.4%

Perceptions Regarding the Number of Other Hunters Typically Seen While Hunting Mule Deer in the Region of Montana Where Respondents Spent the Most Time Hunting Mule Deer During the Past Five Years (Aggregate Results for All Seven Regions of Montana Combined)

Response to... “In terms of congestion & crowding, on a scale from 1 (very unacceptable) to 5 (very acceptable), how acceptable was the NUMBER of other hunters you typically observed PER DAY when hunting mule deer in this **REGION** of Montana? (Circle only ONE number below)”

(Very unacceptable)	1	2	3	4	5	(Very acceptable)
	4.2%	9.1%	33.4%	26.1%	27.2%	

Response to... “In terms of the behavior of people, on a scale from 1 (very unacceptable) to 5 (very acceptable), how acceptable was the BEHAVIOR of other hunters you typically observed when hunting mule deer in this **REGION** of Montana? (Circle only ONE number below)”

(Very unacceptable)	1	2	3	4	5	(Very acceptable)
	1.4%	3.4%	20.7%	40.8%	33.7%	

Satisfaction With Current Mule Deer Hunting Regulations in the Region of Montana Where Respondents Spent the Most Time Hunting Mule Deer During the Past Five Years (Aggregate Results for All Seven Regions of Montana Combined)

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied), how satisfied are you with the current mule deer hunting regulations in this **REGION** of Montana? (Circle only ONE number below)”

(Very dissatisfied)	1	2	3	4	5	(Very satisfied)
	4.4%	5.4%	27.2%	36.7%	26.2%	

Opinions Regarding the Ease of Understanding Current Mule Deer Hunting Regulations in the Region of Montana Where Respondents Spent the Most Time Hunting Mule Deer During the Past Five Years (Aggregate Results for All Seven Regions of Montana Combined)

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (very difficult to understand) to 5 (very easy to understand), how would you rate the ease of understanding the current mule deer hunting regulations in this **REGION** of Montana? (Circle only ONE number below)”

(Very difficult to understand)	1	2	3	4	5	(Very easy to understand)
	3.1%	8.1%	22.0%	42.4%	24.4%	

Opinions Regarding How Complex Mule Deer Hunting Regulations Should Be in Montana

In addition to biological considerations, satisfying the desires of a wide range of hunter interests often leads to complex hunting regulation.

Response to... “Given only ONE CHOICE, which of the following would be most favorable to you in MONTANA as a whole? (Check only ONE below)”

43.4% With few exceptions, mule deer hunting regulations should be the same in most Hunting Districts across the state

-OR-

56.6% There should be a variety of different mule deer hunting regulations across the state to meet the desires of a wide range of mule deer hunter interests

Response to... “Given only ONE CHOICE, which of the following would be most favorable to you in the REGION of Montana where you have spent the most time hunting mule deer during the past FIVE years? (Check only ONE below)”

59.3% With few exceptions, mule deer hunting regulations should be the same across most Hunting Districts in this REGION of the state

-OR-

40.7% There should be a variety of different mule deer hunting regulations across this REGION of the state to meet the desires of a wide range of mule deer hunter interests

Opinions Regarding How Restrictive Mule Deer Hunting Regulations Should be in Montana

Managing for higher numbers of mature mule deer buck (e.g., bucks 4-5 years of age or older) may require implementing more restrictive mule deer hunting regulations. For instance, in current limited permit areas in Montana the average drawing odds are once every ten years.

Response to... “Given only ONE CHOICE, which of the following would be most favorable to you in MONTANA as a whole? (Check only ONE below)”

56.9% The opportunity to hunt mule deer bucks every year somewhere in Montana (with a *lower probability* of harvesting a mature buck)

-OR-

43.1% The opportunity to hunt mule deer bucks once every several years somewhere in Montana (with a *higher probability* of harvesting a mature buck)

Response to... “Given only ONE CHOICE, which of the following would be most favorable to you in the REGION of Montana where you’ve spent the most time hunting mule deer during the past FIVE years? (Check only ONE below)”

60.5% The opportunity to hunt mule deer bucks every year in this REGION of the state (with a *lower probability* of harvesting a mature buck)

-OR-

39.5% The opportunity to hunt mule deer bucks once every several years in this REGION of the state (with a *higher probability* of harvesting a mature buck)

Response to... “Implementing more restrictive mule deer hunting regulations in a Hunting District can lead to increased mule deer hunting pressure on less restrictive Hunting Districts in the state. On a scale from 1 (very unacceptable) to 5 (very acceptable), how acceptable or unacceptable to you is this tradeoff? (Circle only ONE number below)”

(Very unacceptable)	1	2	3	4	5	(Very acceptable)
	7.7%	15.4%	53.1%	16.8%	7.0%	

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (very unimportant) to 5 (very important), how important is it to you to be able to consistently hunt mule deer in the same place in Montana each and every year? (Circle only ONE number below)”

(Very unimportant)	1	2	3	4	5	(Very important)
	5.6%	8.0%	21.3%	28.0%	37.1%	

Opinions Regarding the Timing of the Mule Deer Hunting Season in Montana

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (strongly oppose) to 5 (strongly support), to what extent do you support or oppose the hunting of mule deer BUCKS in Montana during the RUT (generally after mid-November)? (Circle only ONE number below)”

(Strongly oppose)	1	2	3	4	5	(Strongly Support)
	5.3%	6.7%	18.6%	26.7%	42.8%	

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (very unimportant) to 5 (very important), how important is it to you to be able to hunt mule deer in Montana during the week that includes the Thanksgiving holiday? (Circle only ONE number below)”

(Very unimportant)	1	2	3	4	5	(Very important)
	23.2%	10.6%	21.8%	14.8%	29.6%	

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (strongly oppose) to 5 (strongly support), to what extent do you support or oppose the current timing of the five-week general rifle season for mule deer hunting in Montana which starts the third weekend in October and ends the Sunday after Thanksgiving? (Circle only ONE number below)”

(Strongly oppose)	1	2	3	4	5	(Strongly Support)
	3.1%	5.6%	21.0%	27.6%	42.7%	

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (very unimportant) to 5 (very important), how important is it to you that the timing of the general rifle season for mule deer hunting matches up with the timing of the general rifle season for elk hunting in Montana? (Circle only ONE number below)”

(Very unimportant)	1	2	3	4	5	(Very important)
	14.3%	7.0%	19.2%	18.2%	41.3%	

Interest in Hunting Mule Deer in Montana During the Archery and Muzzleloader Seasons in Montana

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (very disinterested) to 5 (very interested), how interested are you in hunting mule deer during the ARCHERY season in Montana? (Circle only ONE number below)”

(Very disinterested)	1	2	3	4	5	(Very interested)
	37.1%	17.5%	18.5%	7.7%	19.2%	

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (very disinterested) to 5 (very interested), how interested are you in hunting mule deer during the MUZZLELOADER season in Montana? (Circle only ONE number below)”

(Very disinterested)	1	2	3	4	5	(Very interested)
	38.5%	16.8%	26.6%	9.8%	8.4%	

Interest in Harvesting Antlerless Mule Deer in Montana

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (very disinterested) to 5 (very interested), how interested are you in harvesting antlerless mule deer in Montana? (Circle only ONE number below)”

(Very disinterested)	1	2	3	4	5	(Very interested)
	39.2%	14.6%	17.0%	16.0%	13.2%	

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (very unacceptable) to 5 (very acceptable), how acceptable to you is the hunting of antlerless mule deer for management purposes (e.g., population control, game damage, disease management, etc.)? (Circle only ONE number below)”

(Very unacceptable)	1	2	3	4	5	(Very acceptable)
	9.0%	6.9%	21.5%	29.1%	33.6%	

Motives (or Reasons) for Hunting Mule Deer in Montana

Response to... “Below is a list of different reasons why people go deer hunting. On a scale from 1 (very unimportant) to 5 (very important), please indicate how important each of these reasons are to you for going MULE DEER hunting in Montana. (Circle only ONE number for each reason listed below)”

Reason:	1	2	3	4	5
	Very Unimportant				Very Important
To enjoy nature and the outdoors	0.7%	0.7%	4.5%	22.1%	72.1%
To get venison for eating	4.8%	4.8%	22.1%	26.3%	41.9%
To do something with my family	7.9%	10.0%	13.4%	24.1%	44.5%
To be with friends who have similar interests	1.0%	3.5%	10.4%	27.4%	57.6%
To feel the exhilaration of the hunt	1.7%	3.1%	14.5%	29.8%	50.9%
To develop my skills and abilities	3.1%	5.5%	23.5%	30.1%	37.7%
To test my hunting skills	3.8%	4.9%	21.2%	30.2%	39.9%
To harvest a trophy buck	2.8%	5.9%	19.0%	28.3%	44.1%
To feel a sense of accomplishment	4.5%	5.9%	21.5%	28.7%	39.4%
To experience solitude	5.2%	4.8%	13.5%	31.5%	45.0%

Satisfaction with Mule Deer Management in Montana

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied), how satisfied are you with current mule deer management in Montana? (Circle only ONE number below)”

(Very dissatisfied)	1	2	3	4	5	(Very satisfied)
	5.2%	8.6%	27.1%	40.9%	18.2%	

Trust in FWP to Manage Mule Deer in Montana

Response to... “On a scale from 1 (little or no trust) to 5 (very high trust), how much trust do you place in FWP to manage mule deer in Montana? (Circle only ONE number below)”

(Little or no trust)	1	2	3	4	5	(Very high trust)
	4.1%	6.2%	21.0%	47.4%	21.3%	

Where Non-Resident Mule Deer Hunters Typically Get Their Information Regarding Mule Deer & Mule Deer Management in Montana

Response to... “From what sources do you typically get MOST of your information regarding mule deer and mule deer management in Montana? (Check ALL that apply below)”

63.7%	Family and/or friends	10.4%	Facebook
34.9%	Word of mouth	3.5%	Instagram
33.6%	Other mule deer hunters	1.4%	Twitter
60.8%	FWP	12.5%	YouTube
48.1%	Montana hunting regulations	9.0%	Television, radio, newspaper, or magazine
7.3%	Mule Deer Foundation	1.0%	Local or regional online event calendar(s)
10.4%	Sportsperson group(s)	1.4%	Community bulletin board(s)
30.1%	Private landowners	5.2%	Other source
30.1%	Website(s)		

Background Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Response to... “During the past FIVE years, have you hunted ELK in Montana?”

45.5% NO

54.5% YES.....“If yes, on a scale from 1 (never or rarely) to 5 (all the time), how often do you also hunt mule deer (or would harvest a mule deer) while you are primarily elk hunting? (Circle only ONE number below)”

(Never or rarely)	1	2	3	4	5	(All the time)
	7.5%	9.4%	17.0%	16.4%	49.7%	

Response to... “During the past FIVE years, have you hunted ANTELOPE in Montana?”

84.6% NO

15.4% YES.....“If yes, on a scale from 1 (never or rarely) to 5 (all the time), how often do you also hunt mule deer (or would harvest a mule deer) while you are primarily antelope hunting? (Circle only ONE number below)”

(Never or rarely)	1	2	3	4	5	(All the time)
	37.8%	13.3%	13.3%	13.3%	22.3%	

Response to... “How many of the past FIVE years have you hunted mule deer in Montana? (Check only ONE below)”

28.9% 1 year

22.7% 2 years

20.3% 3 years

12.4% 4 years

15.8% All 5 years

Response to... “On average, about how many **DAYS PER YEAR** do you hunt mule deer in Montana?”

Mean = 6.9 days per year

Median = 6.0

Age of respondents: Mean 51.8 years of age; Median 53.0

15-19 (2.4%) 20-24 (2.4%) 25-34 (10.1%) 34-44 (19.9%) 45-54 (16.8%) 55-64 (21.2%) 65-74 (19.9%) 75-84 (4.7%) 85+ (2.7%)